Jon Reinaker

Option One

Childhood Books Read

1. **The Little Engine That Could**

This book greatly influenced my outlook on life from a very early point in time. With the main message of the story being one of determination and perseverance, one could not help but feel empowered by the little engine and his courage in accomplishing the task at hand. For him it was making his way up that large hill whereas for myself, it was overcoming any obstacle in my way and never letting anyone or anything defeat me.

1. **Love You Forever**

This book really gave me a sense of security in my home and made me feel very privileged to come from such a loving family. Being one of five kids is definitely cool to say and it’s even cooler to have a close-knit family where love and togetherness are abundant always. Whenever I hear the title, I flash back to my mother rocking me in her rocking chair reciting, “I’ll love you forever, I’ll like you for always, as long as I’m living, my baby you’ll be.” This book also strikes me as a prime example of the human life cycle. We are raised by our parents, reach adulthood, and then it’s our turn to take care of them. Although some parents may not live long enough to have their children see them age completely, the cycle is there and persists as human survival stops at nothing.

1. **The Cat in the Hat**

This book is such a joy to read and truly brings out the child within. Dr. Seuss has a gift when it comes to creating wonderful entertainment through literature. Whenever I was feeling sad or down I would resort to one of the hundreds of Dr. Seuss books we had on our bookshelf and I would lose myself in whatever silliness the chosen book held. When I think of Dr. Seuss stories I can’t help but get a smile on my face and reminisce of Green Eggs and Ham, The Cat in the Hat, and so many more.

1. **Charlotte’s Web**

This story helped me better understand the importance of friendship and how having those who care about you around you is so important to thriving in life itself. A positive support system is key in aiding young children grow both mentally and socially and is imperative as a healthy child learns through literature.

1. **A Christmas Carol**

This story is a wonderful holiday classic that reminds me of all the joys the Christmas season brings. In accord with the actual novel, the movie version does a good job spreading holiday cheer as well. Growing up, the magic themes of the Christmas season, family, health, and togetherness were shown more important than ever and just hearing this novel’s title reminds me instantly of the tremendous happiness I associate with the Christmas season.

1. **Around the World in 80 Days**

This book was always a favorite of mine mainly because of the adventure in its’ pages. From page to page, this adventure never stops and gave me a sense of how important it is to keep a goal in mind and to work hard to obtain it. This novel possesses moments of danger, a little romance, and a sense of hope while making a journey around the world. The lesson: to take whatever means necessary to make your imaginations a reality.

1. **The Swiss Family Robinson**

This book reminds me of survival as soon as I hear that family’s name; a shipwrecked family who have to rely on nature and their own skills to survive. My family can rely on one another no matter what the situation may be and I couldn’t help but think to myself as a child reading this book, “What if this happened to my family?” Upon answering this question, I find myself at ease knowing that my family could survive any sort of situation similar to this because of the strong quality of closeness my family has as well as our ability to react given outside circumstances.

1. **The War of the Worlds**

This book, still to this day, makes me a little uneasy because of how real the plot felt as a child reading it. When I first read it, I was very on edge about the situation at hand and I found myself at a crossroads for the first time while reading; to finish the book, or to not finish the book. It wasn’t so much fear but rather a lack of wanting to move on based upon the vividity of the details that made me think whether or not aliens could land and attack. I think I speak for everyone when a given event in a story overwhelms you and it takes a lot of reassurance to continue reading until the end. It took some tine but I finished the book and realized that it was a very elaborate plot structure testing the human race.

**Generalization from my Reading Experiences**

Looking back through this list of books, I find a lot of ideas, symbolism, and human growth (mentally and physically). There are a great deal of suggestions found that are important for the development of children. Some of these ideas include: perseverance, human survival, love/ of others, and hopeful dreams. These concepts are crucial throughout adolescence and aid the child in an array of tasks and situations he or she may encounter. Perseverance is an important quality to embrace and is necessary in overcoming obstacles. An obstacle referring to a hardship, unexpected event, or physical person preventing he or she from accomplishing a task. Although frustrating, the phrase, “Try, Try, again” comes into play and there is never a negative side in gaining the quality of perseverance. Human survival refers to how and why the human race came to be what it is today. How our species became dominant and more importantly how we have maintained a successful sustainable lifestyle. With basic human survival instincts, we could not have come this far and it’s important for children to realize that the world the way it is today did not get this way overnight. The realization that our society, styles, and standards of living are all results of research, productivity, and industrialization in accord with an attitude of accomplishment that binds humans together; “We have come this far, and will continue to grow.” Love and compassion are necessary for creating meaningful relationships throughout life. Meaningful relationships can be categorized into two groups, personal relationships and family relationships. Both classes are equally important in regards to their benefits and their contribution to an individual’s quality of life. Personal relationships are crucial for companionship and reliability on others (significant others) which provides a sense of belonging in the world. Feeling apart of the “whole” is such an important aspect in life and adversely affects how one views themselves in comparison to the world around them. A sense of family is also important because it gives the child roots of life as well as contributing to belonging as well. Having a stable home life/ family tie gives the child multiple feelings: security, love, and belonging. With these attributes, meaningful relationships prove one hundred percent necessary in childhood and life in general and are important for young adults to embrace as early as possible.

**My English Curriculum**

In the grand scheme of things, we are only as superior as our most meager individual. Through literature, there should not be any short comings and therefore there are aspects of literature that prove important for not only the cognitive development of children, but for the wellbeing of the human race as well. These aspects include: the current state of literature and children in the United States, the prevalence of literature among adolescents, and the eminent importance of literature for the future of the human species. These attributes will shape the teaching of literature as well as what types of readings should be incorporated in English Language Arts Classes.

From my own personal experiences, literature and reading have framed my academics and my interpretation of the world around me. Having a strong background in reading and Language Arts, I learned how to express what I feel and my surroundings with words and this ability has only enhanced my quality of life and my relationships with others. In order to help children accomplish these goals as well, we need to identify with students now in regards to their relationship with literature. According to an article written by Pamela L. Grossman, a system of national standards arising in the 1990’s created by the National Council of Teachers of English, the bar is set so to speak in regards to how well students should do in an array of subjects in school. Students continually show good reports however, the people of the 21st Century would like to see more concrete evidence that teachers are adequately teaching students to maximum potential. In order to address this, I firmly believe that there should me a measurement system in place to ensure that students are being assignment challenging subject matter as well as being tested to prove such knowledge. As Grossman iterates, “In the twenty-first century, English/ computer literacy will also include the critical analysis and evaluation of language and information sources as well as the ability to compose and create in new media forms.”

In regards to the prevalence of literature among adolescents, Nathan Glazer from Harvard University comments on a new novel from E. D. Hirsch and emphasizes a concrete concept in which literature revolves. The core idea of Hirsch is that the content in which someone is reading is so important in accord with having vast background knowledge to relate, interpret, and find reasoning in the material read. I couldn’t agree more with this concept and it is very important for children to read challenging books that broaden their boundaries and extend their existing knowledge. Hirsch’s idea directly corresponds to the idea that what children are reading today with directly influence the future. In an article written by Jim Burke, he stresses that there is a need for fresh, quality reading material. That in order for students to be excited about reading, they need to have new literature that reflects the current time period. “For what we are doing by offering such old, used goods is saying to students that nothing has been written since Lord of the Flies that is worth reading; we are saying that life as we know it in the United States has not changed…” It’s hard to say exactly what genre of books children should focus on or which academic principle one should hone in on when it comes to their studies. However, there is a need for fresh material that will hopefully spark interest and curiosity which will promote reading interest among adolescents.

When it comes to the importance of literature among children, there is no question in my mind that contradicts the benefits of reading at a young age and I strongly encourage the reading of challenging novels and age/maturity appropriate novels. Gary M. Salvner wrote an article that addresses this issue of content appropriateness as well as the need young children have for literature. “Why do the young need literature? Because good books and poems-the kind that comfort and subvert –cannot be cynical. Because stories that address the questions of our day, and allow students to ponder and decipher real answers, overwhelm cliché.” Clearly, Salvner agrees with this principle of importance of content and how helpful literature can be in helping students answer important questions, derive answers backed by validated information, and to find comfort in the pages of a book. With the values and information found in this curriculum, I feel that the specific genre of the books these children will be reading is not as important as each student finding meaning in what they are reading as long as It meets very basic components: it challenges them, it makes them think, and it ultimately makes them appreciate literature and its’ powerful presence in the twenty-first century.

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